



As You Get Settled And Wait For The Session to Begin.....

Write down

1. what you believe is the most accurate predictor of a child's school success.
2. a short definition of parent involvement.

Creating An Environment That Fosters Parent Engagement



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Michigan Department of
Education



Tell Us About Yourself

The ages of children with which
you work or on the behalf of.....

The backgrounds of your children.....

The setting in which you work....

Whether you are a parent.....



Your definition of involvement

Moving to Parent Engagement
which we will be using today.



Engagement

- Committed to
- Engrossed in
- Assuming an obligation
- A promise given

as compared to drawing in as a participant, to include as a part, or to occupy



Ways parents have been engaged in their children's education

Using the sticky notes, jot one idea per note sheet

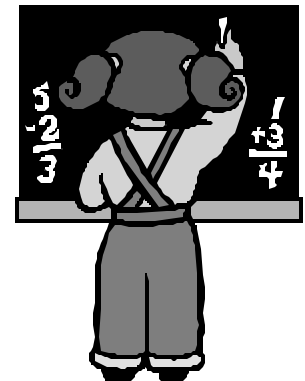
- Parents--List all of the ways you were engaged in the education of your children when they were young.
- Early Childhood Professionals—List ways you have engaged parents in the education of their children.

What Is The Value Of Parent Engagement?

When parents are involved, students achieve more, regardless of socio-economic status, ethnic/racial backgrounds or parent's education level.

Students have:

- Higher grades, test scores, and graduation rates.
- Better school attendance.
- Increased motivation and positive attitudes.





What Is The Value Of Parent Engagement?

When parents are involved, students also have:

- Lower rates of suspension.
- Decreased use of drugs and alcohol.
- Fewer instances of violent behavior and antisocial behavior.



What Is The Value Of Parent Engagement for Vulnerable Children?

When fully engaged partnerships exist between parents and schools, student achievement for disadvantaged children not only improves, it can reach the level of middle income children. The children the farthest behind can make the greatest gains.



What Is The Value Of Parent Engagement For Schools?

When parents are enabled to become effective partners in their child's education, performance improves dramatically in schools where children are failing.



Schools that work well with families

Outperform identical programs without parent/family involvement.

- Have improved teacher morale.
- Have higher ratings of teachers by parents.
- Have more support from parents.
- Have a better reputation in the community.



What Predicts A Student's School Achievement?

The most accurate predictor of a student's school achievement is not income or social status, but the extent which the family is able to....

- Become engaged in the child's education at school and in the community.
- Create a home learning environment.
- Communicate high, reasonable expectations for future achievement.

Why, As Early Childhood Professionals, Is This Important?

The earlier in a child's educational process parent involvement begins, the more powerful the effects.





Our Tasks

- To educate parents of young children on the importance of sustained engagement in their child's education.
- To create an environment for parent engagement in our programs that can serve as a foundation of parent engagement in the years ahead.

Remembering parent engagement is more than a group of parent activities and newsletters. It is a system of shared partnerships in the children's learning.



School means for today:

- Child care centers
- Preschool programs
- K-12 schools
- Child care homes
- Home visiting programs
- ISD buildings
- Etc.

So How Have We Engaged Parents In Their Children's Education?



Sort the ideas you have written
on the sticky notes into the
categories shown on the sheets
on the wall. Now place them on
the appropriate wall sheets.



What types of parents tend to become involved?

Might other parents be involved
in ways you don't see?

What might those ways be?

We are proud of

- High turn out at parent meetings
- High turn out at parent conferences
- The parents who volunteer
- The information in our newsletters



We judge our success with parents based on the above.

But do we look at....



- The parents who don't volunteer or come to conferences/ parent meetings or answer our notes?
Who they are,
why they don't
come, etc.
- Who really reads our newsletters in total?



Program Administrator---

"We need to recognize that all parents can't be involved in the same way. We have to listen to families who aren't engaged in the normal ways. We have to go beyond fund raisers, meetings of large groups of parents, newsletters and school open houses that we have done for years. **Doing more of the same** will not get hard-to-serve families engaged. Instead we have to change what and how we do things if we want to partner with parents for children's school success."



2004 Parent Study Conducted By Epic-MRA

- 1 in 4 Great Lakes parents don't make time to become involved in their child's education.
- Michigan parents communicated the least with teachers, raised the fewest questions, and were the least satisfied with their child's education.



2004 Epic-MRA Parent Study-- Parents who didn't interact were

- 12% more likely to have less than a college degree.
- 13% more likely to be male.
- 11% less likely to have done well on testing when in school.
- More likely to feel like an outsider with only 18% belonging to a school parent group.



What does this mean for ...

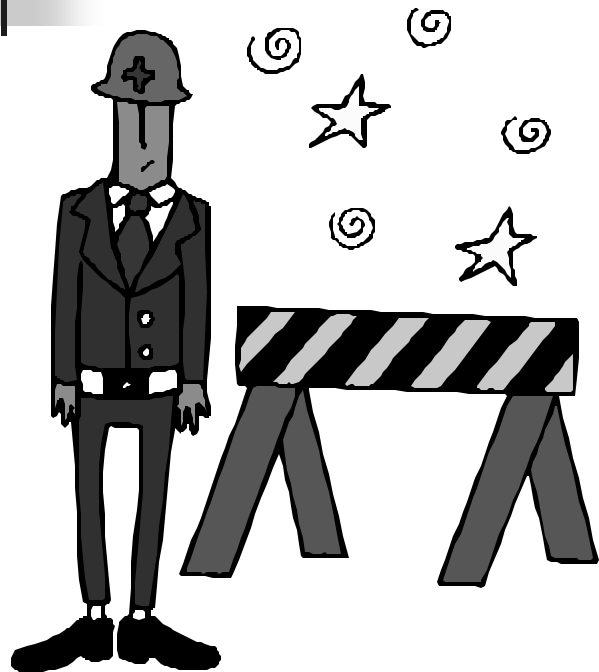
- Getting dads involved?
- For the types of communication we write home?
- Viewing parent organizations as representing all families?
- The school environment and the tone it sets as people walk in the door?



Parent----

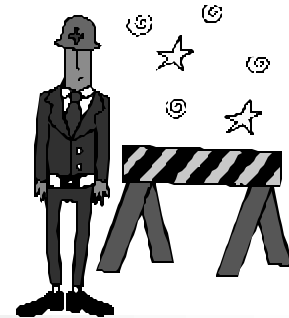
"A lot of activities are offered for parents; but they are always during my work hours, so I can't come. I know other parents who can't come because they don't have child care."

What Are The Barriers To Effective Parent Engagement?



Brainstorm with
your neighbors
and be prepared
to share.

Barriers Include:



Parents not understanding schools	Parents' lack of knowledge on how to help children	Issues of discrimination and exclusion
Language barriers	Schools failing to welcome parent participation	Doing more of the same—failing to reach a % of families
Beliefs about parent, teacher and student roles	Events organized for the convenience of school staff	Lack of parent engagement professional development



Effective Parent Engagement Includes:

- Staff attitudes
- The program being a welcoming place for parents
- Two way communication between parents and school
- Volunteering
- Shared partnership in learning
- Parents as decision makers
- Collaboration with the community
- The school as a parent resource



Attitude

is a Critical First Step in
Effective Parent Engagement



Program Administrator--

"Parent engagement is an ATTITUDE. It is not a list of activities, materials or a curriculum.

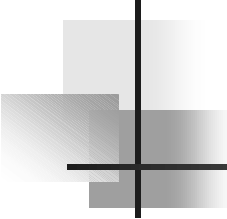
It is day-to-day interaction that respects parents and sees them as equal partners with the school and staff.

For it to work, it must be a budgeted priority for the program/district. It can't just be a nice thing to do when you have the time."



Program Administrator--

"We say we want parent involvement but do we really? Or do we want involvement only when parents agree with us? In reality, parent involvement is often an unspoken taboo."



What Do We Really Think About The Parent(s) of.....

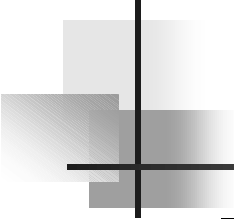
Jot down the first real thought that comes to mind

- A child with difficult behavior?
- A child who is behind and struggling?
- A child whose parents never attend a parent function ?
- A child who comes to you hungry?
- A child who comes to you in a state of disarray and poor cleanliness?
- A child whose mother has never married or finished high school?
- A child who talks back?

What Do We Really Think About The Parent(s) of.....

Jot down the first thought that comes to mind

- A child is well liked by everyone?
- A child who eager to learn and listens well?
- A child whose parent attends all parent functions ?
- A child who comes to you well groomed and cared for?
- A child whose parents are married and have finished their schooling?
- A child whose father asks how he can help his child in school?



What were the labels that came to
mind....

"Schools don't know what to do with us."

"Many teachers talk down to us -they use big words instead of talking our language."

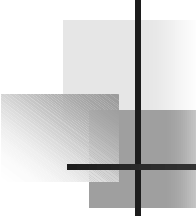




Some labels used by educators to describe parents of less literate students

Stupid	Slow	Overwhelmed	Red Neck
Lazy	White Trash	Pregnant "again"	Convict
Low Life	Reject	Uncooperative	Single Parent

1995 Reginald Clark and Associates



Compare the attitudes behind the labels.....

Caring and supportive	Dumber than dirt
Concerned	Helpers
Strong in many areas	Just like his family
Wants the best	Worthless

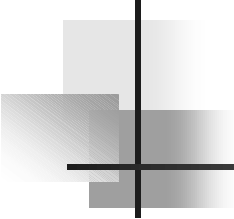


How can these attitudes affect

Your interactions with the parents?

Your expectations of the parents?

Your hope and expectations for their
children?



For parents to become engaged in education

- They must feel respected and valued as individuals.
- They must be supported and viewed as important by schools, teachers, support staff and others in the education community .
- They must have repeated contact with those messages—including at the grocery, the gas station, as well as at school.



Parent Policies, Handbooks Reflect Attitude

Establish parent engagement as a priority

Set the tone for interaction

Establish the school/parent partnership

Provide expectations for staff related to
parent engagement



Analysis of Two Policies

- Policy One

- Policy Two



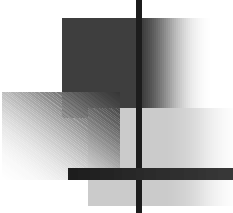
Ask yourself.....

- Do all staff in your program understand the importance of a parent's role in educating their child?
- Are parents viewed as experts on their children and their most influential teachers?
- Are parents treated as true equals in educating the children?
- Is parent engagement a priority and do you create time to foster it?



Ask yourself.....

- Can you and other staff name the strengths of individual families who are raising children under adverse circumstances?
- Do your parent policies appear to protect your program more than welcome parents?
- Is there an expectation that parents are never to be spoken of in negative terms? Has it been operationalized?



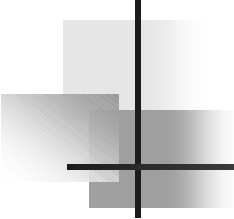
What can you do in your
program to

improve and maintain positive
attitudes about parents and
their engagement?



A Welcoming Environment

The Second Key To Effective
Parent Engagement



Close your eyes and think about walking into your building for the first time

- How can you get in?
- What do you see as you approach and as you enter?
- What colors do you see?
- What decorates the entry?
- What is the level of maintenance?
- What do the signs say?
- What do you hear?
- What is a visitor to do upon entering the building?
- How would you be greeted by the staff you pass?
- Is there a special place for parents?



Parent----

"The minute I come to school I don't feel wanted or welcome. From attempting to get in locked doors that no one comes to open—to being searched for weapons—to halls that are dark and stale—to the school front office where no one ever smiles or greets me. It makes me feel like an intruder who shouldn't have come."

A Welcoming Place for Parents

- A place where parents feel comfortable and welcome.
- Welcoming relates to the physical space as well as the interactions with staff.





A Welcoming Physical Environment Includes:

- Easy entry
- Welcoming signs
- Signs that speak to the importance of parents/families
- Easy to navigate directional signs
- Space for parents to sit and talk
- Parent resource area
- Warm colors
- Exhibits that show authority is shared between parents and school personnel
- Supportive of parents' interest seeing in children's work



A Welcoming Social Environment Includes:

- All staff warmly greeting parents
- School secretary interacts with a smile
- Teachers greet parents by name
- Parents are welcome in the classrooms
- Staff training on creating a welcoming environment
- Security checks are handled courteously
- An active School Welcoming Committee exists
- Language translation is available



What could you do to change..

- The physical environment
 - The social environment

To make the total environment of your program more welcoming to parents?



Two Way Communication

The Third Key

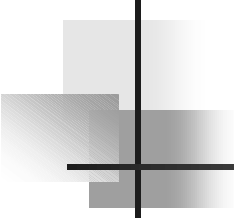
Communication To and From Parents

Formal written communication to all parents—newsletters, handbooks, progress reports.

Daily individual face-to-face interaction between parents and staff—who don't you see?

Informal individually written notes and messages—including email—How many are negative or class information only?

Telephone contacts between individual parents and staff—How many are to share positive things about the children?



Most often parent/school communication is...

- One way
- Impersonal addressing all parents in the same manner- regardless of culture, language, literacy, or life style
- Focused on the child having difficulty or getting into trouble
- About fund raising activities

Effective Two-Way Communication Built Upon ...



- Parents viewed as experts on their children.
- Parents viewed as the consistent teacher over time in their child's life.
- The value of parental input.
- Parents and teachers being equal partners in the child's education.



Is your communication...

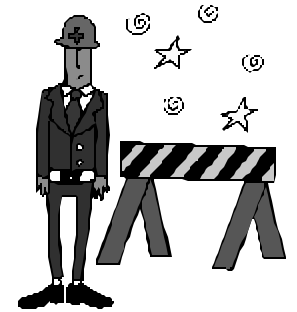
- Truly two way with all parents giving you information equal to the flow of information from you to the parents?
- In a form that low-literacy, non-English speaking, and/or hard to serve families can understand and feel supported by?
- Primarily informal one-to-one communication?



Parent....

"If you want me to be involved, please make personal contact. I am more willing to help if someone calls me or seeks me out personally. Personal contact means you care about me and it goes further than a one size fits all newsletter, letter, or survey sent home. Parent involvement is about relationships, not the amount of paper sent home."

Communication barriers



- School speaks as an authority source regarding the children.
- Events organized in ways that are convenient for staff.
- Written communication in English only.
- Schools want parent engagement in only limited ways.
- Parents feeling threatened by the school.
- Parents don't understand the educational terminology used.
- Cultural beliefs as to the role of the teacher and the parent.
- Parent communication not respected.



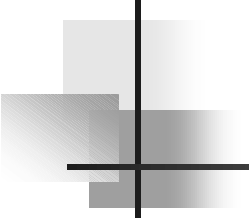
Parent----

"I can't read what you send home. Every note is in English; and when I find someone to read it to me, it is too late to come or do what is wanted."



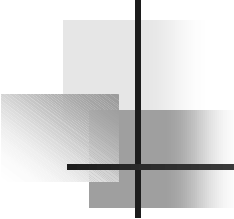
Parent...

"It is disrespectful to come to school. The teacher is to be honored and respected. She is an important, wise individual and if I came it would show disrespect. It would mean I don't trust what she is doing with my child."



The purpose of your Parent-Teacher Conferences?

- To report information?
- To gather information?
- To collaboratively generate plans of joint action?



Formal Parent-Teacher Conferences

- How can you make this formal method of communication reach more parents?
- How can you make the focus of the conference be on the child and family's strengths?
- How can you help parents understand and prepare for future conferences at schools in the upcoming years?



Parent----

"It would be nice to hear from a teacher when my child is good. I only get contacted when he is not. I dread hearing from the school and don't come to any school functions. I help him with homework and talk to him about being good; but the school doesn't seem to care about that. They want me to fix his behavior when I am not even there. Why can't the teachers look for the good in my son and share that with me?"

Talk with you neighbor, about how you can

Encourage hard to
serve parents to
communicate and reach
you?

- Time, method
- Ease of reaching you

Informally
communicate to each
parent **positive**
information about **their**
child?

Make formal and
informal communication
methods more
effective for hard to
serve parents?

Help parents gain the
skills needed to be
advocates of two way
communication at
future schools?

Other things to do

Reach out to parents in a personal way.	Make an effort to regularly talk with every parent.	Avoid mass communication when possible.
Have class open houses, not building open houses.	Make sure they can talk to the real person when they call a teacher.	Interact with parents outside of school-make home visits.
Listen to parents.	Write individual messages.	Ask for their insight and advise on their children.



The Home Environment

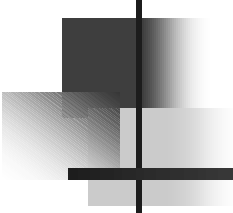
Partnering in Student
Learning

The most effective form of parent engagement is...

When parents work directly with their children in learning activities at home.



**List the ways you would like
parents to support and engage in
their child's education at home.**



Ways Parents Can Be Engaged At Home

Ways Parents Can Be Engaged At Home

Healthy breakfast.	9-10 hrs of sleep.	Listen to children.	Get to school on time.
Expect good attendance.	Talk about what the child did at school each day.	Share a daily meal together with family discussions.	Limit TV/ video games-no more than 2 hrs./day.
Dream about the future (careers, being a parent, growing up).	Spend time together doing something the child enjoys.	Model learning and the use of math and reading in daily life.	Talk about the future and their ability to control the future.

Ways Parents Can Be Engaged At Home

A quiet space to work and think.	Read and discuss books.	Provide active times to run and play.	Encourage and praise new learning.
Focus on child's strengths.	Help children get organized.	Place TV, computers in central location/out of children's rooms.	Provide well lighted area to work and study.

Plus-being available to help on homework and projects.



What do we need to do to support
parents' engagement at home?

What do we need to do to support parents at home?

Provide orientation on how parents can help at home and the strength of assets.	Provide parents with information on skills that will be worked on and how they can assist.	Parents and teachers set child learning goals for the year.
Provide information on the daily things they can do.	Understand the demands on the parents' time/resources.	Make books available for use at home.
Give permission for different levels and types of home engagement.	Make personal contacts with parents at home.	Be available if parents wish to talk about their child or skills to work on.



Parents as Decision Makers

The fifth factor

- The more the parent/school relationship approaches a true partnership, the higher the student achievement.
- Decision making includes give and take discussions, equal partners, policy development, goal setting, and regular follow up on decision effectiveness.
- Parents as leaders.



This factor includes...

Parents serving with teachers and administrators as decision makers related to:

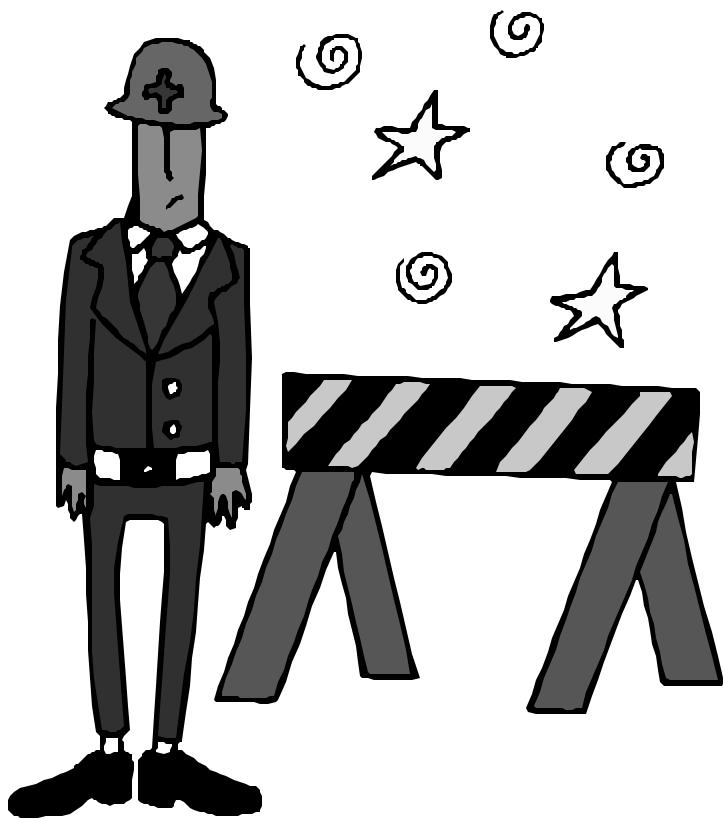
- student learning.
- school improvement plans.
- individual student education plans.

Barriers to Parents Serving as Decision Makers....



- Meeting times.
- Lack of opportunities.
- Structure of meeting.
- Lack of mentoring.
- Token opportunities.
- Ideas never accepted.
- Others?

Often The Decision Making Is Limited To



- Deciding how to spend fund raising profits.
- Planning menus and activities for parties.
- Deciding on room decorations.
- Serving on the PTA/PTO.
- Others?



How can you

- increase parents' role in decision making related to your program?
- assist parents to advocate at future schools for a role in decision making?



Volunteer Opportunities

This factor generally
is the most often thought of when
talking about parent engagement.

Traditionally, stay-at-home parents have filled the
major of volunteer functions during the time
children are at school.



Current Volunteer Opportunities

Which ones directly involve parents working with the children and their learning?

Other Volunteer Opportunities

Mentoring new parents to the program.	Tutoring students.	Classroom speakers/ resource guest.	Serving on a school welcome committee.
Researching information for teacher.	Serve on parents phone tree in evening.	Outreach to hard to serve parents.	Creating and maintaining gardens.
Gathering teaching resources and materials.	Developing parent materials that parents can use.	Identifying community resources.	Creating and maintaining a parent resource area.



Parent....

"I can't tell you how often I have written my name down to help at school and no one ever calls me. Do teachers really want me to be involved?"

What can we do to help a parent that encounters this now or in the future?



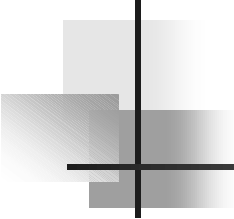
The School As A Parent Resource

- The last factor in effective parent engagement involves the school providing access to resources identified by parents as important to families. This includes working with community partners to create linkages to community resources.



The School As A Parent Resource

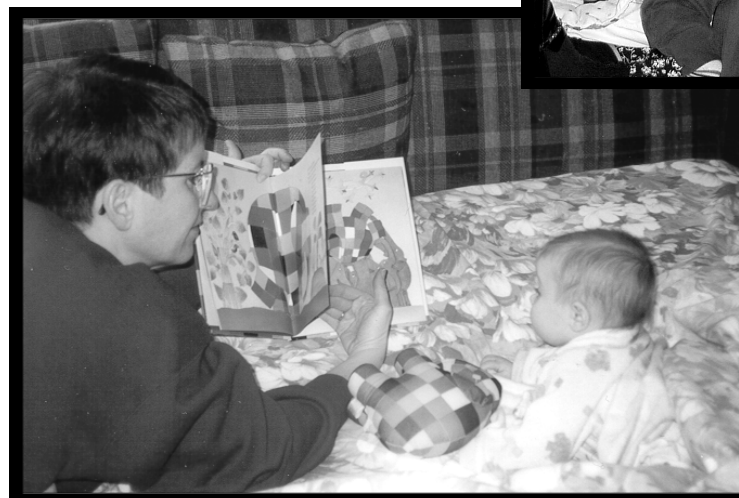
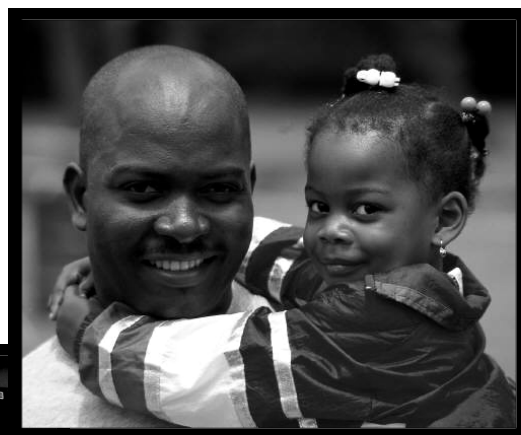
- The school is available to the families and the community at times other than normal operational hours.
- Work with parents on issues that affect the community and well-being of children—including plans of action to address lead exposure, drugs, better nutrition, clothing exchanges, etc.
- Comfortable space for a parent resource area.

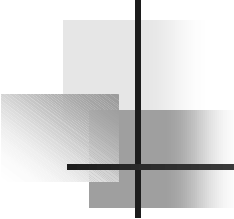


Your plan of action

- Identify one thing you will do to move your program to greater parent engagement.
- Identify one thing you will do with parents to help foster their continued engagement after they leave your program.

Parents- Essential Partners in Education





We are not here merely to make a living. We are here in order to enable the world to live more amply, with greater vision, with a finer spirit of hope and achievement. We are here to enrich the world and we impoverish ourselves if we forget the errand.

Based on statement by Woodrow Wilson



Resources

- Michigan State University Outreach Partnership's Best Practice Briefs
<http://www.outreach.msu.edu/bpbriefs>
- Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships—John Hopkins University
<http://www.csos.jhu.edu>
- North Central Regional Educational Laboratory
<http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas>
- Workshop presentation—email
woodjac@michigan.gov